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Maxwell F. Leslie, Rear Admiral, USN

Maxwell Franklin Leslie was born in Spokane, Washington, October 24, 1902, son of the late W. F. and Inez (Maxwell) Leslie. He graduated from Holmes grade school and North Central High School, Spokane, Washington, and attended the University of Washington at Seattle, before entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from the Fifth District of his native state in 1922. He joined Phi Gamma Delta fraternity at the University. As a Midshipman he played on the baseball team for four years and later continued active interest in this sport as playing-manager of the teams of several ships in which he served. Throughout his career he played in numerous Navy golf tournaments. He was commissioned Ensign on June 3, 1926, and subsequently promoted to attain the rank of Captain, dating from August 1, 1943. He was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral upon his retirement on July 1, 1956, based on combat awards.

During the three years following his graduation, he served successively in the USS *Procyon*, training ship; USS *McDermut*, destroyer; and USS *Colorado*, battleship. Ordered ashore in November 1929 he received flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, and was designated a Naval Aviator on June 6, 1930. After a three year assignment with Observation Squadron THREE, attached to the USS *Oklahoma*, operating in the Pacific, he was ordered to Patrol Squadron FOUR, based at Pearl Harbor, where he served for two years. While in that assignment he received a special letter of commendation for participation in the search in December 1934, for Flight Lieutenant T. P. Ulm.

Between May 1935 and June 1938 he was attached consecutively to Fighting Squadron FIVE, based on the USS *Lexington*, later on the USS *Ranger*, and Cruiser Scouting Squadron FOUR, attached to the USS *Pensacola*. He next had duty at the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, and in May 1940 was ordered to Bombing Squadron THREE. He was serving as Executive Officer of that squadron, based on the USS *Saratoga*, when the United States entered World War II, December 8, 1941, and later commanded that unit, operat-

ing from the USS *Yorktown* in action against the Japanese during the Battle of Midway. He flew with his squadron which operated from USS *Enterprise* while escorting USS *Hornet* for the Doolittle raid on Tokyo, April 17, 1942. "For extraordinary heroism (in the Battle of Midway) on June 4, 1942...he was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation further states in part:

"Leading his squadron in a vigorous dive-bombing assault against Japanese naval units, Commander Leslie, in the face of concentrated anti-aircraft fire and powerful fighter opposition, pressed home his attack with courageous aggressiveness and utter disregard for his own safety. His capable initiative and inspiring leadership contributed to the high state of combat efficiency which enabled his squadron to score at least five direct hits on an enemy aircraft carrier, one on a battleship and one on a light cruiser..." Captain Leslie, then Lieutenant Commander, had the distinction among our carrier pilots of leading his squadron in making the first effective attack by carrier based planes, during the Battle of Midway, against Japanese carriers. This attack occurred at 1225 June 4, 1942 and the large Japanese carrier *KAGA*, is believed to have been the one which received the brunt of the attack. It is known that it later sank. Furthermore, it is believed that this attack was the one which first influenced the enemy to seriously consider that their mission to capture Midway Island might be a failure. He was forced to ditch his plane in the open sea because of fuel exhaustion and was recovered by our forces after a short time in a rubber boat.

Upon return to Hawaiian area he flew as Commander Air Group SIX then in USS *Enterprise* for the initial attack August 9, 1942 against Japanese held Guadalcanal.

Returning to the United States, he had brief duty with the Air operational Training Command at Jacksonville, Florida, during November and December 1942, after which he served as first Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Daytona Beach, Florida. He was ordered, in March 1943, to Hollywood, Florida, to command the Naval Air Gunner' School until November of that year when he was detached to duty at the Army-Navy Staff College, Washington, D. C., for instruction. Completing the course in March 1944, he became an Instructor at the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

In June 1944 he joined the staff of Commander Garrison Air Forces, Western Carolines (Task Force Group FIFTY NINE POINT SIX) as Operations officer. "For meritorious service...(in that capacity)...during the period from July 25, 1944 to December 15, 1944..." he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, with Combat "V," The citation follows in part:

"Captain Leslie efficiently directed the staging of...aircraft squadrons from various points in the United States and the South and Southwest Pacific Areas to the target area in the Western Carolines. In addition...he planned, coordinated and executed strikes and missions against enemy aircraft

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and installations in that area, repeatedly accompanying the strikes to gain information for use in future aerial assaults. Coordinating his forces with others, he assisted in executing heavy strikes against the Philippines. By his professional skill and devotion to duty, he contributed materially to the neutralization of enemy strongholds in the Western Carolines Area...”

In August 1944 he reported as Operations Officer on the staff of the Commanding General, Second Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force, and following brief duty in December of the same year, in connection with air support on the staff of Commander Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, he became Officer in Charge of an Air Support Control Unit, Amphibious Force, Pacific. In the later capacity he participated in the invasions of Okinawa and Iwo Jima. He received a Letter of Commendation, with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, for meritorious service during the assault and capture of Okinawa from April 1, to June 11, 1945.

Following temporary duty with Amphibious Group TWELVE, Pacific Fleet, he reported in August 1945 as Officer in Charge of Air Support Control Unit EIGHT, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet. He continued to serve in that capacity until October 1945, after which he was in command of Air Support Control Units, Amphibious Training Force, Pacific Fleet. The next month, November 1945, he assumed command of the USS *Windham Bay*, and when detached from that vessel in March 1946, he became Officer in Charge of the Naval Air Reserve Training Unit, Miami, Florida.

Between January and August 1947 he was Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Miami, Florida, after which he had duty as an Instructor at the Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia. In June 1949 he joined the staff of Commander Fleet Air, Quonset Point, Rhode Island, as Chief of Staff and in August of the next year was assigned to the Material Control Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., where he served until July 1952 as Head, Shore Establishment and Aviation Branch.

He was then given overseas duty and he assumed command on 19 August as Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Barber's Point, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii. He held this command until detached 13 September 1955 when he was ordered as a member of the Naval Examining Board and the Physical Disability Appeal Board, Navy Department. He was serving in that capacity when relieved of all active duty pending his retirement, effective July 1, 1956. He was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral on the Retired List on the basis of combat awards.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," and the Navy Commendation Ribbon, Rear Admiral Leslie has the Ribbon for and facsimile of, the Presidential Unit Citation to the USS *Enterprise*; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; American

Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the National Defense Service Medal.

He was married to the former Elizabeth Harris Black of Flintridge, Pasadena, California, and they had two sons, Lieutenant (jg) Maxwell F. Leslie, Jr., USN (USNA 1951) and Midshipman William N. Lesiie (USNA 1957), a member of the varsity football squad and Art Editor of the academy magazine *Splinter*.